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**RUSSIA'S FUTURES, FROM FAIRY TALES AND EDITORIALS  
TO KREMLIN NARRATIVES: PROKHANOV, DUGIN, SURKOV**

**Abstract**

The article examines narratives of Russia's geopolitical future that originate in Neo-Eurasianist ideology. These narratives, rooted in the pre-war Russian émigré school of historiography, identify Russia's special civilisational destiny as a land-based power that makes it distinct from Western sea powers. These narratives have circulated among Russia's right-wing intelligentsia since the late 1980s and have recently become mainstream. Their partial adoption by the Kremlin ideologists demonstrates their exceptional staying power and also raises questions about how the Russian ruling elite sees the future. The case studies selected here include the writings of the veteran author Aleksandr Prokhanov, influential theorist Aleksandr Dugin, and the Kremlin advisor Vladislav Surkov. We argue that while Prokhanov's and Dugin's visions are based on eschatological notions rooted in the Russia's pre-Petrine past and in folklore. Surkov's programmatic article that takes some of the same notions as its point of departure is nonetheless a poor attempt at imagining a future as an indefinitely suspended present of the Putin regime.

**Keywords:** Prokhanov, Aleksandr; Dugin, Aleksandr; Surkov, Vladislav; Neo-Eurasianism; newspaper editorials; time in political narratives.

Мы рождены, чтоб сказку сделать былью

[We are born to make fairy tales come true]

*The Song of Soviet Aviators, 1923.*

Ever since the start of Russia's aggression against Ukraine, Putin's ideologists and propagandists have been busy devising narratives of the "Russian world" "getting up from its knees" and correcting an "outrageous historical injustice" imposed upon Russians outside the Russian Federation by the Western powers intent on weakening their defeated Cold War foe. Thus, given Russia's resolute choice not to abandon its people outside its borders, residents of Crimea "were able to peacefully express their free will regarding their own future" (Putin 2014), while the residents of Donetsk and Luhansk regions had to resort to armed insurrection and war in order to defend the future of their language and culture on their own land. These narratives are all too familiar to the viewers of Russia's state-controlled TV channels and other media outlets that have been exploiting them for the last seven years. More recently, following Putin's increasingly draconian political measures, including the decision to change the Constitution and

have the two-term limit on power it stipulates “zero out” for himself, one wonders what sort of future he envisions for his country and, no less importantly, how this future is legitimised. Already in his speech on the annexation of Crimea, he resorted to various historical narratives and myths through which the future of the peninsula was framed and, in a sense prefigured: the original unity of the three East Slavonic nations, the baptism of Prince Vladimir in Chersonesos, the glorious imperial and Soviet military history in which Crimea played an important part as a stronghold common to a whole number of nations united under Russia’s fold. In thinking about the future, Putin’s speech writers and advisors draw their inspiration from a range of sources in all of which the vision of the present and the future is prefigured and predetermined. This vision is always ultra-conservative, most often religious, ultra-nationalist, utopian, at times racist, and on occasion downright bizarre. In what follows we would like to examine a particular futuristic narrative line that is firmly rooted in Neo-Eurasianist fantasies and, in part, in Russian fairy tales. We find traces of the same type of thinking in the rambling, baroque editorials regularly penned by the veteran author Aleksandr Prokhanov, militant scholarly and journalistic texts of the ultra-right philosopher Aleksandr Dugin, and a recent programmatic article of the Kremlin’s long-term ideologist Vladislav Surkov. We argue that although the three approaches to futurity share some of the same ideological basis, they demonstrate a clear difference when it comes to the future. Where Prokhanov envisions the past as prefiguring the future in dreams and fairy tales, Dugin sees the future as a deliberate return to a certain kind of past which to him is an expression of eternity, and Surkov expects the future to be nothing but an extension of the present.

### **Prokhanov and his editorials: the evolution of the Soviet genre**

Among the Russian online newspapers, the weekly *Zavtra.ru* occupies a special position because, as its title [Tomorrow.ru] suggests, the newspaper’s identity is constructed around the notion of the future. The concept of futurity, which the newspaper develops and promotes, is a symbiosis of science and eschatology, technology and religious beliefs, all of which are given political dimensions. This combination makes the idea of achieving the ultimate futuristic dream of humanity - that of immortality - possible, providing there is state leadership which directs the nation along the right path. Historically, from the year of its conception in 1993, this newspaper has been a platform for strong nationalistic and patriotic views.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The newspaper is available online and in hard copies, its declared circulation is 100.000 copies.

It promotes the geopolitical views of popular Neo-Eurasianist ideology which groups or juxtaposes civilisations in terms of their alleged in/compatible worldviews based on historically divergent or similar pasts. As a platform concerned with futurity, the newspaper often generates visions and scenarios for the future which are linked with utopian narratives and, in some cases, fairy tale motifs. In the case of the specific futurity of *Zavtra.ru* the development of this vision is steered mainly through the editorials of by its editor-in-chief, Aleksandr Prokhanov (b. 1938), a veteran journalist and essayist with the career spanning from the late Soviet era to the present. An important public personality, Prokhanov's political vision is based on drawing a line of continuity between pre-modern Russia, the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union and contemporary Russia. He terms this alleged overarching line of permanence "the Empire" and dubs the current juncture in time/space as the stage before the final "Fifth Empire", and presents his vision of Russian religious-technocratic messianism. Focusing on the culture-specific genre of editorials, we demonstrate that the editorials in *Zavtra.ru* are the laboratory of creation of a specific brand of futurity, which is proleptic in its incorporation of the past into a vision of the desired future. We argue that this futurity is simultaneously forward looking and conservative because it glorifies the events of the past on the basis of their futuristic potential which could not be fully realised earlier. The ability to dream as well as the subject matter of dreams become a category for evaluation of the past, present and future of the national states and their people. Moreover, the will and ability to turn dreams into reality are presented as unique characteristics of the Russian people and their leaders.

The style and rhetoric of Prokhanov's editorials are strongly grounded in the form of this genre as it was defined and practised in the Soviet Union. *Peredovitsa* or *peredovaia stat'ia* is a front-page newspaper article which was one of the important means of propaganda in the USSR. In the 1970s, *peredovitsa* was charged with "informing and influencing the wider readership." According to the definition of the style of *peredovitsa* in the 1973 textbook *The Language and Style of the Editorial Article* ("Язык и стиль передовой статьи"), editorials are texts which are used for expressions of subjective and emotive views with the aim of influencing political opinions of a wide collective of readers:

In the editorial articles the factors of subjective evaluation have the decisive influence in the usage of language resources which solve communicative tasks of persuasion, giving directives and aiding the critical evaluation of unfolding events. The language of the editorial

expresses the subjective aspirations of the authors to influence the political and ideological views of the wider readership. Language forms here acquire deeply expressive character [...]. (Solgalnik 1973 58)

Moreover, according to the tenets of the newspaper style and structure, there should be a sharp distinction between a dry and informative style of the rest of the newspaper and the emotive style of the editorial:

Study of newspaper narratives shows that there is a clear difference between informative articles and editorials. The first kind use documentary style conveying information. The second kind have an overtly evaluative polemical character and have the effect of agitation, in many parameters coming close to the language of fiction. (ibid.)

Starting from the Perestroika period of the late 1980s, the Russian language of mass media has developed significantly and became enriched with religious vocabulary and homiletic rhetoric, identified by scholars as “*religiozno-propovednicheskii stil*” – “religious homiletic style” (Gosteeva). This style, in turn, borrows its vocabulary and rhetoric from literary and ceremonial genres, intersecting them with long-form journalist writing (*publitsistika*). The new style partially overlaps with the style of Soviet editorials which synthesised various genres and allowed an expression of authorial subjectivity. What was a set of characteristic features of Soviet editorials becomes a feature of contemporary *publitsistika* with its emphasis on emotive expressivity which has to have an appeal to the large collective of the speakers of the Russian language (Solgalnik 2006). Of special relevance to Aleksandr Prokhanov’s editorials in *Zavtra.ru* is the notion of the symbiotic style of the narrative, which brings together elements of essayistic writing, reportage and fiction. Moreover, Prokhanov also incorporates and even develops a religious-homiletic style by introducing not only religious themes but also by using the rhetoric of religious sermons. Notably, Prokhanov is not only an essayist but also an author of award-winning novels with phantasmagorical conspiracist plots, most of which promote Neo-Eurasianist ideology (Livers 2010, 2020).<sup>2</sup> His experience in a wide range of writing makes him a competent author of the culture-specific genre of newspaper editorials.

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<sup>2</sup> His 2002 novel *Mr. Hexogen* (*Gospodin Geksogen*) won that year’s National Best Seller competition. He also won the prestigious literary Bunin Prize in 2009, the aim of which is “to revive the best traditions of Russian national literature”. In “Obladatelem Buninskoï premii stal Aleksandr Prokhanov”. *Kommersant*. 23. 10. 2009. 12.

### Narratives of eternity and continuity in history

In his editorial “The Fifth Stalin” (“Piatyi Stalin”) (19. 12. 2018) Prokhanov formulates the idea of a homogenous cultural continuity in Russia (Prokhanov 2018). He explains this continuity by the idea of common aspirations for the implementation of dreams into reality. To develop the concept of such unifying continuity he creates the notion “Stil’ Stalin”, “Stalin Style” which he uses proleptically and transhistorically, but, importantly, not transnationally. According to him, this Style already existed in Kievan Rus which united disparate peoples into a cohesive nationality and made way for the building of an empire. The Stalin Style, Prokhanov maintains, achieved its high point during the time of real Stalin whose leadership helped Russia to realize its industrial, technological and military might. Of relevance is the fact that between 1930 and 1953 (the year of Stalin’s death) there indeed emerged style known as *stalinskii ampir*, Stalinist Empire style, which found its representation in architecture, sculpture and interior décor. Characterised by grandeur and pomposity, the style incorporated elements of Deco, Baroque and Napoleonic Empire but, notably, after Stalin’s death, this Stalinist Empire style was criticised for its excesses and extravagant spending.<sup>3</sup> And while today the most iconic architectural monuments of this style adorn the cityscape of Moscow as well as its underground metro stations, they are artefacts of a particular epoch and particular ideology. Scholars of the semiotics of grand buildings and sculptures of the Stalin period note that these structures were erected as “intentional” monuments. They were meant to represent “ahistoricity”, and function “as some sort of utopian preserve of the future where time would not flow” (Yampolsky 98). At the same time, as monuments, they also bridged the past with the future thus creating and reinforcing an idea of homogenous continuity in a given culture.

Fittingly, in Prokhanov’s definition, the Stalin Style is transhistorical, encompassing past, present and future, and, for this reason, it is presented as a cultural phenomenon which emerged long before the historical Stalin. Prokhanov conceptualises this style as a specifically national phenomenon, which unifies national character with the uniquely specific style of leadership. This essentialised uniqueness, in turn, has strong messianic connotations. Notably, the alleged continuity in culture is interrupted only by the outside enemy. Historical Stalin, whom Prokhanov calls the fourth

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<sup>3</sup> See a discussion on this in Day.

Stalin, is presented as the apogee of the so called “Russian time”: “Stalin is a splash of the Russian time from the peak of which eternity opens up” – “Сталин — это всплеск русского времени, с вершины которого видна бесконечность”.

This chronotopic image creates an intersection between time and space, where the space is geopolitically bound to the Russian Empire’s territories while both time and space converge in eternity. The implication is that territorially the Russian Empire will not diminish and that those who live within its borders are guaranteed the kind of future which goes beyond the limits of earthly existence. This eternity is achieved by technological advances and hard work, which will make the return of Stalin himself – the Fifth Stalin - possible. The rhetoric and the imagery have distinct religious-propagandistic overtones in line with the tenets of the Soviet editorials combined with the developments of the last decade of the Soviet Union.

Addressing the issue of real physical immortality, Prokhanov characteristically enmeshes science, art and dreams in his formulation of Russian futurity, in which the resurrection of Stalin becomes a reality:

Скульпторы и художники, стремящиеся поставить монумент Сталину, не спешите и дождитесь его нового появления. Пятый Сталин не будет отлит из бронзы, не будет высечен из гранита или мрамора. Пятый Сталин — это скорость света, это скорость русской истории, это русская мечта. Художник, ты можешь изобразить скорость света? Можешь изобразить русскую мечту?

Sculptors and artists, who aim to put a monument to Stalin, do not rush but wait for his new appearance. The Fifth Stalin will not be cast in bronze, nor will he be cut out of granite or marble. The Fifth Stalin – is the speed of light, the speed of Russia’s history, it is Russian dream. Artist, can you represent the speed of light? Can you represent the Russian dream?

Prokhanov’s vision of the future has broad appeal because it converges elements of religious and scientific utopianism. Notably, Prokhanov is a Fedorovian, and on many occasions he refers to Nikolai Fedorov’s *The History of the Common Task* (1903) as the source of his beliefs in the possibility to achieve the corporeal resurrection of generations of dead ancestors. Fedorov’s scientific utopian thinking had an unparalleled impact on both religious and atheistic futurity in Russia and the Soviet Union. It also

influenced the development of Soviet cosmism which was driven by Fedorov's idea that new planetary spaces will be needed to accommodate the resurrected humans and a growing population of now immortal people (Young). However, unlike Fedorov's quest for a global and transnational collaboration in achieving this task of resurrecting the dead, Prokhanov's cosmism is centred around the nation state and even alludes to the current race towards the colonisation of planetary spaces. It is, perhaps, for this latter reason that he equates Stalin and new Russian Empire of the future with the speed of light.

In Prokhanov's editorials the narrative of historical continuity in Russian missionary dreaming and the strength of the state inevitably has to include the country's current leader, Vladimir Putin. In an article with an explicitly futuristic title, "Putin, a Russian Dreamer" (30.01.2019) "Путин - русский мечтатель", Prokhanov further develops the topic of the Russian dream. In this article, his Fedorovian utopianism and cosmism become overt and enmeshed with folk dreams about a better future. Opening with the question "I would like to understand, what is our state-power, our multi-ethnic Russian Dream?" Prokhanov proceeds by formulating the dream:

Эту Мечту не угадаешь сразу. [...] Её можно понять, если кропотливо исследовать весь путь нашей истории от древних времён до нынешних дней, если услышать, как высказывают эту Мечту самые прозорливые, самые просвещённые люди разных русских времён: её пророки, её ясновидцы, её великие, прозревающие будущее, политики и поэты.

This Dream cannot be guessed quickly. [...] It can be understood by scrupulously examining the whole path of our history from ancient times till recent days; it can be understood by hearing how this Dream is expressed by the most foreseeing and enlightened people of various times in Russian history: its prophets, its seers, its great future-seeing politicians and poets.

Of note is Prokanov's use of the words such as "*prozrevat*" which he borrows from the religious vocabulary and uses in a new meaning. *Prozrevat*' means to start seeing after being blind, which is an allusion to Christian Scriptures (John 9:25), while figuratively the verb means to foresee and predict. This lexical choice results in the image of Russian leaders as anointed by Providence in their historical mission, which includes the current activities of the president of Russia.

### **National dreams and fairy tale narratives**

In this editorial Prokhanov turns to dreams in their relation to various nationalities. He also uses fairy tale motifs as the foundation for what he conceptualizes as specific national dreams. His strategy is to show that dreams need to be turned into reality. Today, the dreams of the Russian nation as expressed in Russian fairy tales are realised by people toiling in science, industry and agriculture: “Русские сказки своим неповторимым языком поведали нам о нашей Мечте, которую сегодня мы продолжаем воплощать в наших лабораториях, на наших нивах, на наших хлебных полях”. (“Russian fairy tales revealed to us our Dream in their unique language, and today we continue to realise it in our laboratories, in our cornfields and farmlands.”)

Turning to Russian fairy tales allows Prokhanov to create a narrative of Dreams which synthesises pre-Christian folk motifs with religious eschatology and scientific futurity. Importantly, Prokhanov uses fairy tales as an expression of a nation’s specificity. Dreams in his rendition become reflections of a nation’s mentality determined by its historical past. Importantly, he mentions dreams of other peoples of Russia and strategically confines his examples to the territorial borders of the Russian state. Describing his conversations with people of various ethnic groups during his travels through Russia, he focuses on the themes in the dreams of immortality and the good life on this earth. He then turns to defining various national dreams of the main powerful states globally, and his choice of the nations allows him to show contrasting dreams as well as different ways in which these dreams are implemented in reality. He first identifies and glorifies the Russian dream as well as the dreams of some ethnic groups of the Russian state, and then formulates his understanding of American and Chinese dreams. The choice of the United States and China is grounded in the geopolitical doctrines of Neo-Eurasianism. According to Neo-Eurasianist views, the United States represents an Atlanticist civilisation, driven by mercantilism and expansionism. Countries of the Atlanticist groups represent civilization which is incompatible with the Eurasian mentality of continental peoples presented as deeply rooted in native soil. China also stands outside of the notion of “complimentary” nations of Eurasia.<sup>4</sup> This is in line with the original Eurasian thinking of the 1920s

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<sup>4</sup> The tenets of Neo-Eurasianism are essentialist and were developed by Lev Gumilev whose work came to prominence with the fall of the Soviet Union. Gumilev coined



defined by Nikolai Trubetskoi, who excluded “old Asiatic kingdoms” such as China from the Eurasian world. The reason for this exclusion was explained by the fact that China as an ancient civilisation was formed before Genghis Khan’s unification of the peoples of Eurasia under the “Pan-Asiatic imperialism” (Trubetzkoy 195). According to Trubetskoi, in its subordination to the Muscovite State, the Eurasian world “achieved for the first time a cultural self-sufficiency” (Trubetzkoy 197). Contemporary Neo-Eurasianist thinking valorises this idea of the homologous development and unity of the peoples of Eurasia.

According to Prokhanov, dreams about futurity develop differently among different nations. In Russia, such dreams materialise in achievements in science which, importantly, in his rendition are presented as being in harmony with both the Russian Orthodox faith and pantheistic beliefs. Fittingly, Prokhanov’s choice of nationalities within Russia itself is selective and in line with the categories of Neo-Eurasianism. His description of conversations held with wisemen and sages during his travels mentions a carefully selected group of the peoples of Eurasia. The absence of some nationalities is particularly evident in his descriptions of travels in the Caucasus when he writes about the dreams of the Ossetians but excludes dreams of the Muslim minorities. Another illustration of strategic choice of ethnic groups is Prokhanov’s mention of the Mari people of the Volga region who traditionally practice animism. The choice of Mari fits current trends in the neo-pagan revival in Russia which accommodates ancestral cults of *rodnoverie* and serves the nationalist agenda (Laruelle). Having paid tribute to the role of dreams expressed in fairy tales—such as the desire for abundance and eternal life—Prokhanov prepares the ground for the culmination of these dreams in the scientific futurity of the Fedorovian brand, which is materialised in the victories of space exploration:

Русская Мечта — мечта космическая. Она несётся в мире с первой и второй космической скоростью, она несётся в мире со скоростью света. (Prokhanov 2019)

The Russian dream is cosmic. It moves with the first and second cosmic velocity, it moves with the speed of light.

His summary of the Russian Dream celebrates the role of the state and its leaders:

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concepts such as *komplimentarnost*’ and “ethogenesis” to argue that some ethnic groups (including Jews) are not compatible with the others. (Gumilev)

Так в чём же она, Русская Мечта? Это мечта о могучем и праведном Царстве, которое окружает и охраняет общество великой справедливости, любви и благодати, где в гармонию приведены силы природы и силы техники, силы отдельного человека и всемогущего государства. Где жизнь лесного цветка и жизнь мерцающей звезды небесной соединены общим ощущением мировой симфонии. Эта благодать добывается великими трудами, великими усилиями всего нашего российского общества, каждой российской земли, каждого проживающего на этих землях народа. (Ibid.)

So what is the essence of the Russian Dream? It is a dream about a mighty and saintly Kingdom which defends the society of great justice, love and grace, where the forces of nature and powers of technologies harmoniously unite with the forces of the individual and the almighty state. It is the place where the life of a forest flower and a shining star in the sky are united by the collective sense of world harmony. This grace is achieved by great labour, great efforts of the whole of our Russian society, of every bit of the Russian soil and of every nationality that lives on this soil.

While Prokhanov pays tribute to the nationalities of the Russian state, he nevertheless maintains that all dreams and hopes of these nationalities converge into a homogenous Russian dream.

Having identified the Russian dream, Prokhanov defines “the American Dream”. While he pays tribute to the US’s achievements in science and technology, he denies the eschatological dimensions of the dream of the American people:

Американская мечта — это “град на холме”, это крепость, построенная на горе, с которой видны все другие, лежащие в долинах, города и селения. И если в каком-то из этих селений возникает беспорядок, американцы из своих бойниц посыпают долинские города и селения своими крылатыми ракетами. (Ibid.)

The American dream is a city on a hill, it is a fortress from which all other cities and villages are observable. And if there is trouble in one of these places Americans start firing rockets from their arrowslits at these cities and villages.

Prokhanov not only promulgates the Soviet image of the United States as a country of aggressors, he specifically limits the so-called American dream to the defence of the existing order without wanting to change the present for a better future.

His definition of “the Chinese Dream” similarly diminishes the role of futuristic visions and presents China as a civilisation of secular orientation:

Китайская мечта, которая сопрягается с Великим Шёлковым путём, — это мечта о восстановлении китайского достоинства, того достоинства, которое на протяжении долгих лет попиралось то англичанами, то японцами, достоинства, которое было растоптано. И сегодня Китай, достигая великого возрождения, стремится утвердить своё существование в гармоничном и цветущем мире. (Ibid.)

The Chinese dream is connected with the Silk Route. It is a dream of re-establishing Chinese dignity, the kind of dignity which for many years was insulted at times by the English, or by the Japanese, a kind of dignity which was trampled upon. Today China, reaching its great rebirth, aims to assert its existence in a harmonious and flowering world.

What explicitly characterises and distinguishes these two national dreams from the Russian dream is their lack of daring eschatological aspirations. Both of these dreams, in Prokhanov’s construal, are concerned with this worldly life but lack the vision of immortality. Having described these alternative national dreams, Prokhanov’s editorial makes a rhetorical conclusion about the distinctive character of the Russian dream:

Русская мечта — это храм на холме. Мы построили холм из наших верований, страданий, поражений, из великих побед и откровений. На вершине этого холма мы построили храм, который своими крестами касается небесной лазури, касается света Фаворского. И этот свет проливается к нам, на землю, в наши семьи, на наши космодромы, в наши гарнизоны, на наши заводы. (Ibid.)

The Russian dream is a temple on a hill. We have built the hill from our beliefs, suffering, defeats, from great victories and revelations. On

the top of this hill, we have built a temple whose crosses touch heaven and the Tabor light. And this light shines on the earth, on our families, on our cosmodromes, on our garrisons, on our factories.

Russia is presented as a country of dreamers who are united by transgenerational ties:

Мы — мечтатели. Ты, я, родившийся вчера младенец и старик, доживающий свою долгую жизнь. Россия — это страна мечтателей и героев.

We are the dreamers. You and me, the baby who was born yesterday and the old man, who is at the end of his long life. Russia is the country of dreamers and heroes.

In this editorial Prokhanov suggests that only those who have a common dream can have a future. Russia comes out as a leader because of its alleged ability to implement the boldest futuristic dream of its peoples, namely, to achieve immortality. Of note is the fact that Prokhanov is prepared to grant people of nations such as the USA and China the ability to dream, albeit in an inferior way. This can be explained by the fact that his notions of future are proleptic and take into account a common historical past. This model of assigning significance to the shared past and an affinity of goals is in line with the main principles of Neo-Eurasianism.

In this context, Prokhanov's selection of nations and their dreams has a telling void – it excludes European states, nations and their dreams. The absence of Europe in this scheme of civilizations is quite conspicuous and as such it is a void which must serve a purpose. In terms of the Neo-Eurasianist geopolitical doctrine, Western Europe is an Atlanticist civilisation due to its colonial expansionism and the de-territorialisation of continental borders. The editorial article is a mix of subjective imagination, fiction and political discourse, and as such it is a form of literature which relies on deconstruction by its readers. It is expected that the reader will fill the void based on his or her general knowledge. Readers of the newspaper cannot fail to notice this void as Europe/EU today is an important political entity. The void thus becomes a device that signifies a hidden meaning. The question which Prokhanov invites his readers to ponder on is this: Why is Europe not part of his thematization of national dreams? The answer, we propose, lies in a carefully chosen strategy: If the narratives of the unifying dream are a foundation of a given nation, then the European Union does not fall into this

category because it is a young and inorganic entity. Eurasian Russia is presented as a homogenous civilization which is founded on identical drives and hopes in spite of its multi-ethnic composition.<sup>5</sup> (Hence the purpose of mentioning diverse nationalities such as formerly animistic, but today mainly Orthodox Mari people of the Volga region and Orthodox Ossetians.) The United States and China also are the entities which have, according to Prokhanov, a common task. They have been integrated historically into nations with people who share the same dreams because they were moulded by common mythologies. Europe and the EU are fragmented entities when it comes to the “dream” reflected in fairy tale motifs and narratives. From this follows that the EU/Europe does not have a common dream and therefore cannot have a future. Historically the systematic collection of fairy tales by folklorists occurred at the time of the rise of the nation state at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Romantic philologists such as the Brothers Grimm collected fairy tales in the Germanic lands, and not in “Europe”. Viewed in this context, the EU might be a political entity, but, by implication of the Prokhanovian notion of dreaming together, it has no future because its people were not brought up on the same dreams. The logic of Prokhanov’s reasoning is circular: in order to have a dream one has to be brought up on the same dreams. If people do not share the dreams through generations, they cannot succeed in the way they think about the future because they do not dream together. The implication is that the EU is not going to be a major player in the domain of futurity because its mission is not based on the firm foundation of the narratives which have homogenous beginnings and happy endings.

### **Mixing Fairy Tales with Geopolitical Doctrines**

While Prokhanov’s editorials perform the same function as they did in the Soviet press, his style has characteristic features which correspond to new developments in the essayistic writing that emerged since the 1980s. Prokhanov’s editorials both reflect this development of religious-homiletic style and imagery and employ a number of features of the Soviet newspaper editorials, one of them being an expectation to refer to a wider political context. In this case, the context relates to the geopolitical situation of Russia *via-à-vis* the European Union in all its complexity. Moreover, his implicit categorization of fairy tales as underpinned by the unifying role of the national state is a manifestation of his authorial subjectivity. Such subjectivity was a prescriptive feature of the Soviet editorials which has received further developments in current Russian media.

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<sup>5</sup> On Neo-Eurasianism and futurity in Prokhanov’s fiction see Mondry.

By choosing to treat dreams and fairy tales within the notion of the nation state Prokhanov adheres to a view of fairy tale motifs which has its beginnings in the era of Romanticism with its emphasis on national heritage. Importantly, according to this folkloristic paradigm, the phenomenon of similar plots in fairy tales and myths among peoples is explained by similarities among *rodstvennye narody* (kinship peoples), stressing their common genealogical origins. A later concept of *brodiachie siuzhety* (migratory plots), articulated by Aleksandr Veselovsky (1838-1906), puts an emphasis on cross-cultural influences and the mobility of plots. Fittingly, in the Stalin era in the post-WW2 period, followers of the Veselovsky school of folkloristic thought were criticized for the notion of migratory and transnational plots.<sup>6</sup> Such theoretical views were regarded as unpatriotic as they diminished the notion of exclusivity and specificity of national myths (Veselovsky).

Prokhanov's concept of the specifically national dreams and fairy tale motifs conforms to the nationalistically-tinted understanding of fairy tales. More importantly, his adherence to the notion of the common plot motifs among the *rodstvennye narody* intersects with the Neo-Eurasianist geopolitical ideology. Yet he adjusts the notion of *rodstvennye narody* by excluding other Slavic peoples such as Ukrainians making his void politically motivated and recognisable by readers. With Ukraine's leanings towards Euro-Atlantic structures, the current rift between Russia and Ukraine clearly has an impact on Prokhanov's elaborations on the dreams about the future.<sup>7</sup> It is for this reason that he selectively concentrates on ethnic groups situated geographically to the east of Moscow to both reiterate and politically modify the foundations of the original Eurasianism. (In Trubetskoi's writing, Ukraine, in spite of the period of colonisation by Poland, was viewed as a Eurasian civilisation.) Additionally, Prokhanov's inclusion of dreams of shamans and wisemen intertwines animistic beliefs with the Orthodox faith to reflect the fashionable syncretistic religious and cultural trends, such as *rodnoverie* and quasi-New Age movements in vogue in Russia today. This syncretistic collage, in turn, echoes the phantasmagorical plots of his novels as well as the plots of other fantasy

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<sup>6</sup> On the history of trends in Russian and Soviet folkloristics see Meletinskii. The publication of Meletinsky's book became possible during the brief period of Thaw in the Soviet Union. The second edition came out after the fall of the Soviet Union.

<sup>7</sup> On Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic orientation see Vineta Kleinberga and Elizabete Vizgunova in this issue.

literature which deal with the resurrection of famous historical personalities, including Stalin and even Nikolai Fedorov himself.<sup>8</sup>

It is important to reiterate that dreaming together is not the only factor which guarantees a radiant future for Russia. In line with his notion that the Russian people turn Russian fairy tales into reality, Prokhanov maintains that political leaders have to be able to implement common dreams into reality. In his editorial “Lenin, a Man of the Sky” (“Lenin – chelovek neba”) (22.04.2020), dedicated to Lenin’s birthday, Prokhanov calls Lenin a great “futurolgist” who could not only predict future but also “realise it.”<sup>9</sup> Notably, in fictional genres, such as Soviet science fiction, dreams and the future have to turn to reality while realisation and actualisation of dreams have to complement the ability to dream collectively (Gomel). At this juncture Prokhanov’s narratives link the pathos of the newspaper editorials with the plots of Soviet futurity fiction and current fantasy literature in line with the canonical principles of Soviet newspaper writing. In terms of the tenets of the genre of the editorials, Prokhanov incorporates all its major characteristics. On the one hand, his editorials have a degree of subjectivity which renders critical questioning of his revelations superfluous. On the other hand, his views about futurity and the achievement of immortality are not entirely fictional. To be effective they are grounded in the futuristic trends and activities of contemporary Russian society which, according to a recent anthropological study, has strong movements and communities who work on the achievement of immortality and the extension of life beyond the confines of the earth by techno-biological means.<sup>10</sup> In this way the emotive-subjective writing of Prokhanov’s editorials responds to the wider context of trends and aspirations of contemporary readers. Notably, his propagandistic editorials promote political agendas by advocating the cohesiveness of the multi-ethnic empire – “the Fifth Empire” – whose future is construed as invincible and eternal because its past and present are fortified by homogenous dreams. The political leaders of this Empire are presented as great visionary dreamers and futurologists who have the ability to mobilise people “to make fairy tales come true”.

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<sup>8</sup> Viktor Sharov’s novels fall into this category. See an interview with him on “Shkola zlosloviia”. On these plots see Mondry 2017.

<sup>9</sup> “Ленин был экономист, политик, футуролог, он остро ощущал будущее, он его предрекал и потом реализовывал” (Prokhanov 2020).

<sup>10</sup> See Bernstein, a recent anthropological study of contemporary futurity groups, including followers of Nikolai Fedorov and Cosmists. The study is based on interviews and placed in the context of Russian thinking about scientific and religious immortality.

These last words – “we were born to make fairy tales come true” which come from the song of the Soviet aviators written in the 1920s encapsulate the overarching expression of Soviet and post-Soviet national futurity advanced by Prokhanov. Read against the backdrop of the newspaper editorials, the line from the song embodies both continuity and change between the Soviet and post-Soviet propagandistic futurity. The wording of the song of the early aviators has a remarkable flexibility which captures both the overt and the hidden dimensions of collective dreams’ propaganda powers. In the 1920s, this line served as an incarnation of the atheistic technocratic dream to fly and to conquer the sky. Notably, the line-slogan strongly alluded to the motifs of Russian and Slav fairy tales about the flying carpet, “*kover-samolet*” which, as a form of folk creativity, were interpreted as devoid of religious mysticism. Overtly, the conquest of the sky by Soviet aviators was positioned to negate religious beliefs in the sky as heaven. Yet, paradoxically, the dream of reaching the sky could not be separated from religious eschatology, and the atheistic state’s propaganda learned to make veiled use of people’s quest for the afterlife. In Prokhanov’s editorials the three components – the scientific-technological, national fairy tales and trendy post-Soviet syncretistic beliefs - are amalgamated in line with, and by means of, this genre as defined by Soviet textbooks and practiced in Soviet newspapers. The continuous effective power of these editorials lies in their emotively expressed use of the proleptic futurity grounded in the power of historical narratives to incite patriotism and nationalism.

### **Dugin on being, time and eternity**

Prokhanov’s figure is now mainstream; the resonance and influence of his writings is significant: he is invited to TV talk shows and gets interviewed in major media outlets on a regular basis. This is not only due to his indisputable literary talent and long-standing reputation as a radical journalist. The Neo-Eurasianist ideas that drive his prolific visions are also influential and inform the writing of political theorists and even key politicians whom they advise. It is hardly surprising, considering that in search of a new master ideology that would make sense of Putin-age Russian and Soviet history as a continuous line, the latter have been increasingly tempted to adopt the Neo-Eurasianist model that largely ignores the political nature of successive regimes but instead employs the geopolitical logic of particularism. Aleksandr Dugin, the supreme guru of this movement, throughout his illustrious career, has been consultant to a wide array of politicians, from former Russian State Duma Speakers Gennady Seleznev



and Sergey Naryshkin (the latter currently head of SVR, Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service) to LDPR leader Vladimir Zhirinovskiy. His geopolitical theories to this day inform some of the ideological tenets of the regime even though the man himself is no longer welcome in mainstream media and government offices due to the extremist nature of his ultra-right views. Long-time friends and associates, Prokhanov and Dugin share roughly the same platform, but where Prokhanov works mainly by creative association and flights of literary fancy, Dugin, former Chair of Sociology of International Relations at Moscow University from which he was banished in 2014 for his public call, at the peak of the Donbass war, to "kill, kill, and kill Ukrainians" (Dugin 2014) relies on scholarly methods. Dugin's evolution as a thinker led him from membership in the late Soviet chauvinist and anti-Semitic Pamiat' movement to the creation, together with the writer Eduard Limonov and rock musician Yegor Letov, of the Nationalist Bolshevik Party, and finally to the International Eurasianist Movement.<sup>11</sup> His ideas owe as much to Eurasianism as they do to the German Conservative Revolution (esp. Karl Haushofer), pioneers of geopolitical discourse (esp. Halford Mackinder), European National-Bolshevism, the French Nouvelle Droite, as well as to Martin Heidegger whom he quotes in just about every treatise. As Andreas Umland points out, the term Neo-Eurasianism, in his case, is not entirely accurate (Umland 466f). More recently, Dugin rebranded his political philosophy and now calls it "the Fourth Political Theory": it serves as an alternative and a counterweight to those three that dominated the 20th century and beyond: communism, fascism, and liberalism. In Dugin's "fourth theory," the original Eurasianist premise discussed above in reference to Prokhanov, morphs into the notion that collectivistic and traditionalist land powers, or tellurocracies, are poised to fight against individualistic, liberal sea powers, or thalassocracies. These two poles are still centred around Eurasia on the one hand and the Atlantic on the other, but the geographic principle does not necessarily always apply as countries in outlying regions could be co-opted by the Eurasianist cause as long as the strict criteria of nationalism and traditionalism are adhered to. But what is behind these criteria?

Like Prokhanov, Dugin too often contributes to *Zavtra*. His style is quite different from his older colleague's, but his contributions also seek to furnish the readers with edifying political narratives that, like Prokhanov's, focus on the future, albeit as one would expect, Dugin's are formulated with more scholarly precision. In 2017, *Zavtra* featured a very revealing conversation between Prokhanov and Dugin. In it, Dugin goes to the heart

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<sup>11</sup> For a comprehensive assessment of Dugin's evolution as a thinker see Shlapentokh 2017.

of what his “fourth political theory” is all about: a future defined by a specific, axiological understanding of time as infused with eternity. This eternity is easily accessed if one follows Dugin’s lead:

Современный либерализм тоталитарен, глобален. И чтобы противостоять ему, ни в коем случае нельзя возвращаться ни к коммунизму, ни к фашизму, ни даже к их национал-большевистской помеси, потому что это тот же самый Модерн. Четвёртая политическая теория предлагает выйти за пределы политического Модерна, за пределы и либерализма, и коммунизма, и фашизма, и соединить будущее — постсовременность, постмодерн — с традицией, с возвратом к традиции, интерпретированной как вечное, а не как прошлое. В духе Нового времени мы обычно считаем, что настоящее отменяет прошлое. [...] То, с чем мы имеем дело, — это время, отпавшее от своей оси. Возвращение к оси, по образу и подобию которой время и создано, есть задача Четвёртой политической теории. На этом основании строится проект будущего, который воплощается в теорию многополярного мира, поскольку каждый народ в ней являет главную ценность. Народ становится носителем той вечности, о которой идёт речь, поэтому пробиться к ней, минуя народ, невозможно. Универсализм здесь очень тонкий. Соединение всего происходит через углубление каждого народа в своё частное.

Contemporary liberalism is totalitarian and global. And in order to resist it, one should by no means go back either to communism, fascism, or even their national-Bolshevik cross because it is still modernity. The fourth political theory offers us the opportunity to step beyond political modernity, beyond liberalism, communism, and fascism and to connect the future—postmodernity, the postmodern—with tradition, a return to tradition interpreted as eternity, not as the past. In the spirit of Modernity, we generally hold that the present cancels out the past [...] What we are dealing with here is time that has fallen off its axis. To return to this axis in whose image time has been created is the task of the Fourth political theory. The project of the future is built upon this foundation—it is embodied in the theory of a multipolar world because in it, every nation manifests its own supreme value. The nation becomes a carrier of the eternity we are talking about here; therefore, it is impossible to get through to it bypassing the nation. The universalism here is very subtle. Everything

is bound together through an immersion of every nation into its own particularity. (Prokhanov, Dugin 2017)

This vision is clearly eschatological as it anticipates the end of time and the Second Coming when time is no more. In *V poiskakh temnogo Logosa* (*In Search of the Dark Logos*), a volume of essays published in 2013, Dugin offers an erudite excursion into Greek philosophy, early Orthodox theology as well as the work of Martin Heidegger all of which are used to support his geopolitical doctrine. Pointing to Heidegger's location of the possibility of authentic *Dasein* in the temporality of the future, Dugin explains that it is only by a decisive "switching of one's regime of existence towards *Er-eignis* [singular event]" that one can be saved by the eventuation of "the Truth of Being." (Dugin 2013 347). This, to Dugin, is not just a philosophical premise but rather a call for political action that neatly fits into his political-religious construct. It is by transitioning to the latter that the Truth of Being can be entered as the authentic future. What is this construct? In essence, Dugin champions the pre-Petrine and pre-Schism political order based on the Byzantine paradigm. In his view, Ivan the Terrible is the model, quintessential ruler, "the figure of the tsar philosopher, an eschatological analogy of the first Christian emperor Constantine setting the church and political order in his kingdom as the execution of God's will" (Dugin 2013 37). More recently, Dugin has consistently asserted Russia's role as the *katechon*, that which holds the Antichrist at bay as per 2 Thessalonians 2.5-7: "And you know what is now restraining him, so that he may be revealed when his time comes." In Dugin's 2018 "Theses on the Antichrist" published in his videoblog on the *zavtra.ru* website, he asserts that "the Orthodox Tsar is he who stands at the last stronghold, before the Antichrist. And when he falls, and a hole opens up in Being, the Antichrist comes" (Dugin 2018). Predictably, when in the 2017 conversation we just cited, Prokhanov who, as we have seen, is fond of the "city" metaphor, asks Dugin to "fantasise" about a city built according to his own views, Dugin paints the following picture:

Он, во-первых, должен быть концентричен. Если мы сейчас предложим этот город, мы придём к Москве дораскольного периода. В центре находится ось — воплощение самой вечности в человеческом мире. Царь и патриарх, духовное и земное, связанное воедино. Этот город строится вокруг своего центра. Центр является священным. В нём находится дворец и храм. Два уровня вечности: вечности небесной, которая воплощена в патриархе, в церкви, и вечности земной, недвижимым двигателем

которой является царь. Соответственно, вокруг него эта вечность расходится лучами, как солнце нисходит по вертикали. [...]

First of all, it must be concentric. If we offer [a vision] of this city now, we will come to the Moscow of the pre-Schism period. At its centre, there will be an axis: the embodiment of eternity itself in the human world. The tsar and the patriarch, the earthly and the spiritual, bound together. This city is built around its centre. The centre is sacred. In it, we have the palace and the temple. There are two levels of eternity: heavenly eternity embodied in the patriarch and earthly eternity whose immoveable mover is the tsar. This eternity radiates from him same as the sun descends in a vertical. (Prokhanov, Dugin 2017)

This picture is consistent with Dugin's adherence to the Byzantine notion of a symphony of the secular and ecclesiastical powers which in Muscovy was presumably in place from Ivan III to the Time of Trouble and subsequently in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, during the rule of the first Romanovs until Nikon ended it with the Schism of the Church. Dugin's model does not envisage more than three classes or castes (*sosloviia*) in this society: below the symphony of the philosopher tsar and the Church patriarch, stand philosopher priests, noble warriors, and, finally, labourers on the land: "Так мы приходим к идеалу Святой Руси. Есть Святая Русь — перемещаем в XXI век. Другие материалы, но вечные формы." (Prokhanov, Dugin 2017) ("Thus we come to the ideal of Holy Rus. There is Holy Rus—we move it into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.") Dugin's authentic *zavtra* is neo-medieval: it is both archaic and post-modern in that it steps over hated modernity with its utopia of liberal democracy. This said, his understanding of modernity is peculiar: he does not cast away the Soviet experience—not in its entirety anyhow—because, as he asserts in his 2012 textbook *Geopolitika sovremennoi Rossii* [*Geopolitics of Contemporary Russia*], Stalin's USSR, despite its atheist and internationalist ideology, was nonetheless "a new edition of the Russian land-based tsardom, while Stalin was a 'red tsar'" (Dugin 2012 327). In this scheme, Moscow as the 15th-century Third Rome becomes, post 1917, home to the Third International, "a *geopolitical instrument* of spreading Russia's tellurocratic, land-based influence" (ibid., original emphasis). Thus, the Christian messianism of the Muscovite Tsardom is equally reflected in the messianism of the world revolution centred in Moscow, particularly after the arrival of Stalin's 1925 "socialism in one country" doctrine which makes the Soviet capital the centre of messianic gravity, a different kind of *katechon*. Given Stalin's fascination with Ivan the Terrible, this parallel is rather self-

evident, and, much like Prokhanov, Dugin is clearly inclined to incorporate Stalin both into his geopolitical and eschatological construct of Holy Rus, despite Stalin's dogmatic Marxism, an obvious product of modernity and an offshoot of the European Enlightenment project. This, no doubt, is due to the fact that Stalin, Dugin's red monarch, somehow re-established, if unconsciously, the umbilical link to the authentic *Dasein* of eternity which after his death is lost again.

Importantly, although Holy Rus in Dugin's scheme, is the *katechon*, other Indo-European nations that set themselves up according to his vision will be welcome in his empire. This empire stretching "from Dublin to Vladivostok" will embrace them if they share this vision and agree to be part of it on Dugin's terms. The terms stipulate, for example, that while most nations should retain their particularity, some other ones have no claim to it whatsoever. Thus Ukrainians (with the exception of those living in the far West of the country to whom Dugin allows some form of nationhood) must realise that they are actually Russian. This is precisely what he asserts in his intimate "geopolitical diary" *Ukraina: moia voina (Ukraine: My War)* (2015) whose title, genre, and the overall preoccupation with the geopolitics of the future allude in no uncertain way to Hitler's *Mein Kampf* (even as Dugin's book condemns the Ukrainian "junta" as a quintessentially Nazi project). Ukraine as a nation state within its current borders, in his view, is nothing but a pernicious utopia spun by the Western liberals:

Большая Украина – это чушь, несбыточная, злобная, мелкая, завистливая и кривая, основанная на ressentiment в качестве национальной идеи. А вот Великая Россия не чушь. Это было, и это будет. Наши земли сужаются, а затем – как пружина – расширяются. И так всегда. Это бьется русское сердце. В 1991 году мы снова сжались. С Осетии, Абхазии и особенно с Крыма и Новороссии начался обратный отсчет – время Империи. Многие хотят нас сдержать, но не удастся. Мы строим вообще другое общество, другое Государство, чем то, которое есть сейчас. От нынешнего переходного состояния не останется камня на камне, как не осталось камня на камне от Российской империи, а затем от СССР. И мы идем не назад, но вперед. Вечность не прошлое, она всегда еще и настоящее и, главное, будущее. Вечность вообще впереди. Это и есть самый настоящий авангард. Индоевропейская Священная Империя Конца – вот наше истинное будущее. (Dugin 2015 485).

Greater Ukraine is nonsense: unrealisable, evil, petty, envious and crooked, based on *ressentiment* as its national idea. Great Russia, however, is no nonsense. It has been, and it will be. Our lands shrink and then, like a spring, they expand. This has always been so. This is the Russian heart beating. In 1991, we shrank again. A reverse countdown began with Ossetia, Abkhazia, and especially with Crimea and Novorossiia: the time of Empire. Many want to restrain us, but they won't succeed. We are building a completely different kind of society, a different kind of State from the one we have now. No stone will remain from today's transitional state as no stone was left from the Russian Empire and then the USSR. We are going forwards, not backwards. Eternity is not the past, it is always the present, and most importantly, the future. Eternity is ahead. It is the very real avant-garde. The Holy Indo-European Empire of the End: this is our true future.

Dugin's vision of the future has no alternatives: as someone who believes he can access eternity, the axis of time, he clearly considers himself in possession of the knowledge of what is to come, even if this future may be deferred. Dugin's 2014 diary ends on the note of bitter disappointment as Russia, despite starting the war in Donbass, setting up and supporting the separatist "republics," fails to move to a direct annexation of "Novorossiia" with its own troops and instead settles for a stalemate, signing the Minsk agreements, while he himself gets fired from his position at Moscow University for inciting hatred and murder. This failure, according to him, is due to the efforts of the liberal fifth column within the Russian society as well as what he calls "the sixth column," the oligarchs who only look after their own purses. Of all the Kremlin officials whom he castigates throughout the book, the most blame goes to Vladislav Surkov, Putin's erstwhile ideologist and in 2014, the person directly in charge of the Kremlin's Ukrainian diplomatic and military front. Surkov, too, has visions of the future inspired by Neo-Eurasianists.

### **Surkov, the "deep people" and Putin's "long state"**

In February of 2019, Surkov, at this point a presumed private citizen as he had resigned from his official position as Putin's advisor for the CIS countries, caused quite a stir in the Russian media, both conventional and social, with an article entitled "Putin's Long State" in which he made a few bold pronouncements about the future of the regime, its place in the country's history and its fundamental difference from Western democracies. Overall,

this article is far from spectacular, and it would have passed unnoticed had it not been written by the author of the “sovereign democracy” concept coined in the mid-2000s as the main slogan of Putin’s 2007-2008 election campaign. In “Putin’s Long State,” Surkov starts out by discarding the very notion of democracy altogether as so much illusion. “The illusion of choice,” he argues, “is the most important of all illusions, the trademark trick of the Western way of life overall, and of the Western democracy, in particular. [...] A rejection of this illusion in favour of realistically acknowledging what is predetermined has led our society first to contemplate its own, special, sovereign version of democratic development, and then to a complete loss of interest in discussions on what democracy should be like and whether it should exist at all” (Surkov 2019)

What we have in Russia, instead, is a state that does not need this imported “chimera” but is guided by the logic of historical processes. This country, whose place in history, is “far from modest,” went through a period of disintegration and then “returned to its natural and solely possible state of a great power” – a great power that increases in size, gathering communities of nations. This state, gathering lands, like Muscovy in the 14th-15th century, is of course Putin’s Russia, an “organically shaped model” of Russia’s “survival and elevation” for the coming years and decades until the end of this century. Surkov’s horizons of futurity are modest. His historical horizon, however, are rather less so. Echoing the 15th-century slogan of Moscow the Third Rome, he proposes a fourth. According to him, Putin’s Russia is the fourth model of statehood in the country’s history: it sits next to Lenin’s USSR which in turn is preceded by the Russian Empire of Peter the Great and the Grand Principality of Muscovy of Ivan III. Yeltsin is conspicuously absent from this list, as the founder of post-Soviet Russia and Putin’s anointer. Even more noteworthy is the fact that neither Ivan the Terrible, nor Stalin are mentioned as the current president’s political antecedents but are simply subsumed under the Muscovite and Soviet models. It is, however, quite clear that the main national idea articulated in Surkov’s article is that of “land gathering” and military expansion.

“These political machines replaced one another, got fixed up and adapted along the way, ensuring the Russian world’s consistent upward movement, century after century.” Their creators, were, according to Surkov, what Lev Gumilev calls “people of long will.” Gumilev’s figure is very significant in the context of Surkov’s ideological proposition: Gumilev first applied the term “people of long will” to the “passionary” Mongols who eventually co-opted their neighbours to conquer the boundless steppes and

thus ensured their own survival. Thus, the ideology of Eurasianism that propounds Russia's middle path of development, distinct from both Western and Eastern, is a clear subtext to Surkov's vision and is so signalled, just as it is the foundation of Prokhanov's and Dugin's views. At the same time, Surkov's article also contains echoes not of Peter the Great's Roman, secular, and Westernised vision of a Russian Empire, but rather of the Russian empire of Nicholas I, the police state of the gendarme of Europe reigning under the aegis of Count Uvarov's official nationality doctrine, with Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and Nationality guiding the way forward. There is no conspicuous Orthodoxy in Surkov's opus, because his too is ostensibly a secular, and presumably religiously inclusive vision, but it is a vision that resolutely refuses to import any Western notions, and also one in which the very idea of Russia's uniqueness replaces (or implicitly incorporates) the religious component. Without this component, however, the uniqueness rings rather hollow as there is no divine "eternity" from which his model could be suspended.

Autocracy and nationality (*narodnost'*) feature very prominently in the article, and again Surkov's versions of these two concepts are presented in counterpoint to the Western notion of the democratic state. Just as Peter the Great, on his visit to England, rejected the idea of parliament as nonsense for a country like Russia and just as Lenin, in *The State and the Revolution*, rejected the idea of multi-party democracy as bourgeois veneer that hides and protects the exploitation of the masses, Surkov unmasks Western democracy to expose what in Turkish is known as *derin devlet* or the deep state. This term, explains Surkov, "signifies a hard, totally undemocratic network of real power structures concealed under the window dressing of democratic institutions. [...] It is a mechanism hidden deep under the surface of the civil society that in practice operates through violence, corruption and manipulation." This kind of exposure of Western democracies is of course nothing new and forms the core agenda of the Russian media, broadcasting both domestically and to foreign audiences. What is new, however, is that in Surkov's manifesto, the Western deep state is countered with the Russian one—a state that while certainly not quite as pretty, is far more honest. It has no need for Western hypocrisies because it has no need to hide its power structures, no need to drape the truth with illusions: "The high inner tension associated with maintaining control of vast non-homogenous spaces and the constant participation in the thick of geopolitical struggle make the military-police functions of the state most important and the decisive." The honest Russian state has no need to conceal its necessarily brutal police and military functions; furthermore, they must be displayed for everyone to see.



Instead of the deep state, Russia has “a deep people” (глубинный народ). What is this people? No definition is given, and the description is more than vague.

Глубинный народ всегда себе на уме, недостижимый для социологических опросов, агитации, угроз и других способов прямого изучения и воздействия [...] Своей гигантской супермассой глубокий народ создает непреодолимую силу культурной гравитации, которая соединяет нацию и притягивает (придавливает) к земле (к родной земле) элиту, время от времени пытающуюся космополитически воспарить.

The deep people always has its own idea of what is going on, is inaccessible to sociological surveys, threats, indoctrination, and other methods of direct impact [...] With its giant supermass, the people creates an insurmountable power of cultural gravitation that binds the nation and pushes (presses) down to earth (the native soil) the elite which from time to time attempts to hover up in a cosmopolitan flight.

One finds out its true feelings and desires always too late. This inner *narod* is truly mysterious in that it does not fully coincide with the population. There is no point idealising its sections which is what at various points in time did Russian populists, Slavophiles, and Bolsheviks.

Surkov's new understanding of *narodnost'* is then immediately linked with Putin's “long state.” This state is unique in that it can actually hear and understand the people, the *narod*, “see through it,” and act accordingly. The Russian model is based in trust. The deep people can only trust the leader, “первое лицо.” This is not the naïve faith in the good tsar as exhibited by the Russian peasants for centuries (even though it has its roots in this faith). The deep people is not naïve, and the trust it has in the leader is based on understanding, cooperation, and effective communication exercised through various institutions of the state as well as informally. Thus, instead of the Western oppositional model based in accountability of the leader and consequently inherent mistrust, the Russian one is open, honest and based in utter trust. And because of this trust, Putin's state is a long one, its principles will outlive Putin himself and will continue long afterwards, akin to the Gaullist state in France or even the state of the founding fathers in the US.

While Dugin's nation is a bearer of eternity, Surkov's model of futurity, as we have seen, lacks this essentialist religious axis or Prokhanov's essentialist national dreams. Surkov's vision is, on the one hand, hollow and bland and, on the other hand, no less fanciful and fairy-tale-like. Instead of the Christian eternity beyond our fallen time or dreams that drive nations' development through socio-economic formations, Surkov proclaims the implied eternity of Putin and his regime—supported by nothing, except some dark magic of “the deep people” about which we know nothing and never will. In 2020, the current Speaker of the State Duma Vyacheslav Volodin, put it in even plainer language when asked whether the Constitutional amendments adopted at Putin's suggestion that year were introduced in order to create a system that will come after Putin: “Why, after Putin, there'll be Putin!” (Volodin 2020). Surkov and Volodin thus openly suggest that Putinism is larger than Putin the man and will outlive him. Surkov's article did not get an official response from the Kremlin (apart from a lukewarm nod from Putin's press-secretary Peskov), but just about every pro-Putin commentator praised the article as an important discussion document, while most liberal commentators predictably ridiculed it. Dugin and Prokhanov, too, were asked what they thought. Prokhanov, in an interview with the Kremlin's top propagandist Vladimir Solovyov, said that while Surkov was right to name the deep people as the nucleus of Russian history, he failed to identify “its content” which, in Prokhanov's view, is “the dream of a strong, benevolent state, a kingdom that defends the meek, the poor [...], often the dream of the kingdom of heaven” (Prokhanov 2019). This dream that, as we know, according to Prokhanov, was cherished by the deep people throughout both the imperial and the communist era is something Surkov “is afraid to talk about” (ibid.).

Dugin went further in his criticism. While stating many logical and legitimate facts, Surkov, in Dugin's opinion, spoke for the country's entire elite which desperately wants for Putin's status quo to last forever. Such pronouncements, says Dugin, are usually made just before a state, on the eve of its collapse, loses touch with reality. This is akin to hypnotising people to believe that everything will stay as it is in the present. Putin, for his part, although a hero, has exhausted his potential, and the future is not his.

Путин сделал огромный вклад в развитие России, его заслуги нельзя ставить под сомнение. Это спаситель и герой нашей страны. В этом отношении я считаю, что его миссия выполнена. Путин полностью исчерпал все, что он мог сделать хорошего. [...] Соответственно, Путину полностью принадлежит настоящее и

совершенно не принадлежит будущее. В будущем потребуются полное изменение и пересмотр всех параметров сложившейся в России системы. (Dugin 2019)

Putin has made a tremendous contribution to the development of Russia; his achievements are beyond any doubt. He is the saviour and hero of our country. In this regard, I think that his mission is accomplished. Putin has completely exhausted everything good that he could do. [...] Thus, the present fully belongs to him, but the future does not belong to him at all. The future will require a complete overhaul of all the parameters of the system that has taken shape in Russia.

Surkov may have borrowed some key notions from the Neo-Eurasianist discourse that drives the ideas of Prokhanov and Dugin, but his future is indeed far from “passionary.” Just as the secular dreams of the Americans or the Chinese in Prokhanov’s editorial, Surkov’s future is devoid of eschatology, aspirations towards eternity, or dreams of immortality. Emptied out of that content, it is indeed a suspended present, with nothing but Putin’s person to prop it up.

### **Conclusion: eschatology, nationalism, and geopolitics**

It is quite apparent that Putin’s propaganda machine has hit a wall after the initial wave of post-Crimea euphoria subsided. The narrative of the Russian people rising up from its knees following years of post-Soviet humiliation clearly had a limited shelf life, with an ideological void at the core of the Putin regime urgently requiring new concepts in order to shape a vision of the future that would logically stem from a narrative of the past. Neo-Eurasianist discourse provides a very tempting model to follow. In our case studies of Aleksandr Prokhanov’s editorials and Aleksandr Dugin’s we have demonstrated that the future proposed by these utopian ultra-right figures is based on eschatological notions rooted in the Russia’s pre-Petrine past and in folklore. Proleptic or analeptic, their future is neo-medieval and not entirely compatible with the reactionary yet secular nature of the Putin regime. Vyacheslav Surkov’s desperate attempt at adapting the Neo-Eurasianist narrative to the geopolitical requirements of the Kremlin is, however, devoid of any emotive appeal and is an apt reflection of the stagnant state of Putin’s regime whose increasing draconian qualities make its future prospects ever so much dimmer.

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